UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF MUSIC

Iranian Music Concert

Curated and conducted by Kaveh Mirhosseini

2025 University of Toronto New Music Festival
Reza Vali, Roger D. Moore Distinguished Visitor in Composition
Norbert Palej, *festival coordinator*

Friday, January 31, 2025 at 7:30pm | Walter Hall, 80 Queen's Park

PROGRAM

Opening video:
Video and narration: Kaveh Mirhosseini

Dance of Dayereh

Heshmat Sanjari
(Arr. Kaveh Mirhosseini)

Soloist: Farzad Khorshid-savar

Beloved of the Sky

Iman Habibi

1. Beloved of the Sky
2. Woo
3. Self-Portrait

Majnoon Naboodam

Afarin Mansouri

Choopi

Shahab Paranj

Soloist: Farzad Khorshid-savar

Intermission

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

As part of the Faculty's commitment to improving Indigenous inclusion, we call upon all members of our community to start/continue their personal journeys towards understanding and acknowledging Indigenous peoples' histories, truths and cultures. Visit indigenous.utoronto.ca to learn more.

Simorgh

Golfam Khayam

Funebre–Canadian première

Reza Vali

Soloist: Bijan Sepanji

Folk Songs–Canadian première

Reza Vali
(Arr. Kaveh Mirhosseini)

1. Love Song
2. Song from Loristan
3. Love Drunk

Soloist: Saina Alikhani

Baba Karam

Kaveh Mirhosseini

Video: Sanam Allameh
Narration: Parastoo Amanzadeh
Research & story: Kaveh Mirhosseini

ARTISTS

Voice
Saina Alikhani

JAM Orchestra
Violin I
Bijan Sepanji
Aysel Taghi-Zada
Saba Yousefi
Esther Van Rooi
Natasha Hendra
Melie Inageda

Violin II
Elizabeth Loewen Andrews
Felipe Luzuriaga
Noa Sarid
Elana Lin
Satchi Kanashiro
Caleb Chiu

Violin
Bijan Sepanji

Viola
Alex McLeod
Jacob Clewell
Mobin Naeini
Ruby Jackson

Cello
Emma Schmiedecke
Ryan Wu
Antonia Cambre

Daf & Dayereh
Farzad Khorshid-savar

Double Bass
Daniel Lalonde
Jude Littlefield Buschlen

Piano
Narek Abrahamian

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Kaveh Mirhosseini, a Doctoral student at the University of Toronto, is an Iranian composer, conductor, percussionist, and researcher of Iranian folk music. He founded the Tehran Cantus Ensemble, which performed and recorded more than 30 pieces by Iranian Composers in Tehran. He also established MECA (Middle Eastern Composers Association) to collect an extensive archive of Middle Eastern composers, perform their pieces, and introduce a new diversity of composition styles from the Region.

He has played in the TSO (Tehran Symphony Orchestra) for fourteen years as a principal percussionist and guest conductor of the TSO and the Iran National Symphony Orchestra in his professional career. Many different orchestras, ensembles, and soloists performed his compositions, such as the Mili Reasurans Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Hakan Sensoy (Istanbul, Turkey), Koda Orchestra, conducted by Oguzhan Kavruk (Izmir, Turkey), Annie Kosanovich (Oregon State University, USA), Branka Parlic (Silk Road Music Festival, Serbia), Gokce Bahar Oytun (Istanbul, Turkey), Respina Sting Quartet (Tehran Contemporary Music Festival).

Four Albums released by his compositions:
“Illusion” for Violin & 58 Violin Orchestra performed by Lora Kmieliauaskaite, 2023.
“Illumination” Concerto for Violoncello & String Orchestra, performed by the Cantus Ensemble.
“The Waste Land” for solo Bassoon Performed by Elise Jacoberger.
“Mysticism” String Quartet performed by the Respina String Quartet.

As the artistic director of JAM Music Center in Toronto, He has expanded his profession internationally and received several commissions to record orchestral works by Iranian and non-Iranian composers, such as Christos Hatzis's Zeitgeist and Winter Solstice, Reza Vali's Zand, M.R. Darvishi's The Lost of Truth, Mehran Rouhani's For Those, and …

In 2021, his Cello Concerto "Illumination (Eshragh)” was awarded BARBOD, the essential Iranian musical award.

Reza Vali was born in Ghazvin, Iran, in 1952. He began his music studies at the Conservatory of Music in Tehran. In 1972 he went to Austria and studied music education and composition at the Academy of Music in Vienna. After graduating from the Academy of Music, he moved to the United States and continued his studies at the University of Pittsburgh, receiving his Ph.D. in music theory and composition in 1985. Mr. Vali has been a faculty member of the School of Music at Carnegie Mellon University since 1988. Vali's orchestral compositions have been performed in the United States by the Pittsburgh Symphony, the Seattle Symphony, the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, the Baltimore Symphony, the Memphis Symphony Orchestra, and Orchestra 2001. His chamber works have received performances by Cuarteto Latinoamericano, the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, the Carpe Diem String Quartet, Kronos Quartet, the Seattle Chamber Players, and the Da Capo Chamber Players. His music has been performed in Europe, China, Chile, Mexico, Hong Kong, and Australia and is recorded on the Deutsche Grammophon, Naxos, New Albion, MMC, Ambassador, Albany, and ABC Classics labels.

Dr. Afarin Mansouri is an internationally acclaimed composer, curator, and opera artist blending Iranian heritage with Western musical traditions. A recipient of numerous accolades, including the Global Music Award Silver Medal and the Canada 150 Medal, she has collaborated with leading organizations like the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, National Ballet of Canada, and Tapestry Opera. As Artistic Director of Cultureland Opera Collective, she fosters cultural awareness through socially impactful operatic productions, such as The Echoes of Bi-Sotoon and The Refugees. Her recorded works include the debut album Dancing With Love, a collection of Eastern-inspired love songs and audio opera Little Heart, both released by Centrediscs. Her compositions, including the orchestral prelude Mithra and cantata Humans Arise!, amplify voices advocating for justice and women’s rights. As an educator, she has taught at institutions such as Wilfrid Laurier University, Seattle opera, Canadian Opera Company. Dedicated to equity in the arts, Afarin continues to innovate through her compositions, and is preparing for a new artistic residency at Tapestry Opera.

Shahab Paranj is an Iranian-born composer, conductor, instrumentalist, and educator, known for pioneering the integration of Persian and Western composition techniques. He holds a BA in Music Composition from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, an MM from the Manhattan School of Music, and a PhD from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).
A virtuoso tombak player, Paranj has performed, recorded, and collaborated with renowned artists worldwide. Praised as "extraordinary" by the *San Francisco Examiner* and celebrated by composer John Adams for his "unique voice," his compositions diverge from traditional Eurocentric conventions, drawing deeply from the rich traditions of Persian music.

Recent commissions include works for esteemed ensembles, orchestras, and festivals such as Delirium Musicum, Russian String Orchestra, Intersection Contemporary Music Ensemble, Long Beach Opera, Jâca Duo, Aleron Trio, San Francisco New Music Ensemble, One Great City Duo, MSM Symphony Orchestra, the International Low Brass Trio, the Jacaranda series, and Hear Now Ensemble. Additionally, he composed the original score for *Dressage*, which won the 2018 Berlin Film Festival award for Best Feature Film in the Generation category.

As a scholar, Paranj's research focuses on the Iranian Avazi Style, and he has presented on this subject at prestigious seminars, including the SEM, AMS, and SMT 2022 joint annual meeting. His honors include the 2004 Hoefer Prize from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, the APSIH Distinguished Scholar Award, and recognition from the Mehr Humanitarian Society (2010) and the City and County of San Francisco (2011).

Paranj is the founder and music director of The Iranshahr Orchestra and serves as the artistic director of *“Du Vert à l’Infini,”* a contemporary music festival in the Franche-Comté region of France. In 2024, he released his first album as a conductor with Naxos, featuring American soprano Hila Plitman and compositions by Richard Danielpour. He currently serves as the Artistic Director of the Center for Iranian Music and is a faculty member at the UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music

Iman Habibi, D.M.A. (Michigan), is an Iranian-Canadian composer and pianist and a founding member of the piano duo ensemble Piano Pinnacle. Hailed as “a giant in talent” (the Penticton Herald), "whose technical mastery is matched by his musical and cultural literacy" (Hudson-Housatonic Arts), Dr. Habibi has been commissioned by The Boston Symphony, The Philadelphia, and Toronto Symphony Orchestras, The Orchestra of St. Luke's and The Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music, and has been programmed by The Carnegie Hall, The Tanglewood Music Festival, and The Canadian Opera Company, among others. His Shahin-Nameh is nominated for the 2024 JUNO Award for Classical Composition of the Year. He is a 2022 laureate of the Azrieli Music Prizes, and has received multiple SOCAN Foundation Awards and the Brehm Prize in Choral Music (2016), among numerous others.

Golfam Khayam in Tehran 1983
Golfam KHAYAM's music is described by AL Jazeera as "Innovative Art", and being described as “a perfect testament to the universality of music.” Winner of Rostrum of Composer “ windows on the world”, Arvo Pärt center composition scholarships prize. Her captivating and personal musical language has brought broad attention to her music worldwide. She has initiated a research on technique adaptations from Persian regional ethnic instruments. Golfam has been receiving commission works worldwide by highly recognized musicians, this partly include Barbara Hannigan, Iceland Symphony orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre de la Radio France, ICE ensemble, Klangwerkstatt Berlin, Opera America among others. Her music has been featured in Elbphilharmonie, southbank center, opera America, opera Aix-en-Provence, Royal festival Hall, Maison Radio France, Venice Biennale. She has been signed with ECM records and is currently associate professor at Tehran Art University.

Heshmat Sanjari (April 1, 1917 – January 4, 1995) was a well-known Iranian conductor and composer. After studying violin at the conservatory, Sanjari briefly conducted the Tehran Conservatory Students Orchestra and was the Conservatory's director in 1951. From 1960 until 1971, he was the permanent conductor of the Tehran Symphony Orchestra, the longest tenure in the orchestra's history. During this time, many notable musicians, such as Yehudi Menuhin and Isaac Stern, played with the orchestra under

his direction. As a guest conductor, he conducted the National Iranian Radio and Television Chamber Orchestra and several European orchestras. He also composed the works Persian Miniature (in five movements) and Niayesh (Praise) for choir and orchestra. Some regard the former as a masterpiece of contemporary Persian symphonic music.

After the 1979 Iranian revolution, Sanjari and orchestra played only a few concerts 10 years after the revolution. The pressures of this new situation caused him to become depressed in 1989, and after 5 years, he fell ill and died on January 4, 1995.

PROGRAM NOTES

Dedicated to my mother, “Shahla Milani”, an Iranian opera singer whose voice has been censored by the government for 45 years. She single-handedly stood up against the regime and fought tirelessly to keep the light of classical singing alive in Iran.

As a composer, I have always been immersed in the question: is there such a thing as good or bad music? After composing, the most pivotal moment in my life was my journeys across Iran, from city to city and village to village. During these trips, which were dedicated to researching the music of Iran’s ethnic groups, I became particularly drawn to the music of the people (not pop music). This included work songs, lullabies, religious music, mourning music, street and marketplace tunes, game songs, protest chants, and the melodies of farmers masterfully playing local instruments or sailors singing on the deck to keep rhythm during their work. These songs emerged from the hearts and daily lives of A single individual does not create people. Instead, they arose through everyday events, historical milestones, special occasions, or even simple habits of ordinary people. They were continually retold, reshaped over time, and now exist in the form we encounter today. For instance, who created the “Neymeh” melodies of Bushehr? Who composed “Sahari” music? Who first performed the “Chapleh” chants? What inspired the people of southern Iran to sing “Yazleh”? There are many such examples. It’s often impossible to declare anything with certainty about their origins. However, with some reflection, one can see that all these forms of music were born out of necessity and created for specific purposes. Therefore, their roots can be traced back to their functions. Through extensive research and based on documents left by Karamali Karimzadeh (known as Baba Karam), as well as further explanations from his family, newspapers of the time, and insights from Malook Aghouz (known as Aft), who first sang this melody with Hossein Hamdaniyan (similar to how the wedding song attributed to her has been passed down to us), I concluded that the song “Baba Karam” could be considered one of the most important and powerful melodies of Iranian folk music (known as “street music”). Perhaps hundreds of millions of Iranians have heard this piece since its creation, have memories of it, and have danced to the famous Baba Karam-style dance. For me, as a composer, beyond the beauty and power of this melody, and the story behind it, is incredibly inspiring. A a story born from a neighbourhood and a love story created by entirely ordinary people who, without realising it, used simple and everyday phrases like “Don’t break Baba’s Jar”, “I love you, Baba Karam,” or “Oh, ice cream, oh, ice cream, the first of spring’s ice cream,” to craft a musical masterpiece. The most captivating aspect for me is that an entirely ordinary musical act performed by people with no formal connection to music can, over time, transform into a masterpiece. Now, I can confidently answer my initial question: there is no such thing as bad music, even those we might label as “banal.” But this leads me to another question: how many infinite musical masterpieces exist in the world that we remain unaware of?

Inspired by the iconic Canadian artist, Emily Carr, each movement of this piece either directly pays tribute to one of her paintings or tries to capture a predominant theme that many of her works share. Scorned as Timber, Beloved of the Sky (pictured on the right) is the title of a powerful painting by Emily Carr, one that made a strong impression on me when I first saw it at the Vancouver Art Gallery, and is the inspiration behind the second movement of the piece. Emily Carr’s paintings transport me to her natural world, reminding me that we are not just connected to nature, but that we are nature herself. In the first movement, I visit the sense of wonder and bewilderment her paintings of dense forests convey. Woo was Emily Carr’s infamous pet monkey, and the final movement is an inward reflection, inspired by her 1939 self-portrait.

Reza Vali's Funebre for Solo Violin and String Orchestra
Funebre was originally the third movement of a work for string quartet and string orchestra called Four Movements. I made an arrangement for solo violin and string orchestra. I wrote Funebre in memory of my father who passed away in 1985. The entire harmony of the piece is based on a quote from the opening harmony of Richard Wagner's Tristan and Isolde prelude. The passionate wailing of the solo violin represents the extroverted expression of grieving in Persian culture, while the subdued harmonies in the strings allude to the introverted sense of grieving in Western cultures. In a way, this work superimposes the sense of grief of opposite cultures.

Seven Valleys of LOVE , Scene VII Simorgh
Based on "Conference of the birds" by Attar (1145 - 1221 A.D) one of the pioneers of mysticism and sufism before Rumi. It helped me go through the server uncertain situation during lock down in 2020. This old nonreligious mystical text is in a way very actual, giving direct solutions to various uncertainties: birds are gathering from all around the world to reach their ideal mythological God bird Simorgh , escaping from uncertainty from their lands and nests. Along this voyage they go through Seven Valleys… and finally instead finally find themselves to be the Simorgh themselves (Si = 30 , Morgh = Birds), as only 30 birds remain…
Here, I adapted the ancient melody of Deylaman , which has always haunted me, for solo cello. Where Simorgh flies from the top of the sky. The two big wings of the Simorgh on both sides of the sky are the two sections before and after the Deylaman theme, lands of our world under her gaze, as if the Simorgh is still watching over us.

Metaphor- Seven Valleys of love
What is love?
A question probably as old as humanity.
…. Attar 12th century Persian Soufi and poet when considering love as an abstract concept, associated with neither religion nor naïve romanticism, seemed very ahead of his time.
And what a journey he takes us on! Seven paths, or destinations. Seven stages that gradually lead the seeker towards love as a light, a fire, a healer, a sun… T owards love and its paradoxical capacity to burn and enlighten, to purify and show the way. « Love is the deepest core of your beings » says Attar.
And what is love now?
A word broadly used or (mis)used in pop culture and that often appears to have lost its inherent value?
Maybe.
A word that remains sacred, with no geographical, educational, social, cultural borders?
A word particularly strong and important in this time epoch ?
This particular work Seven Valleys of Love is a connection to the road Attar opened for us many centuries ago: the belief that understanding and cherishing truthful love can be a cure for injustice, racism, intolerance and beyond.